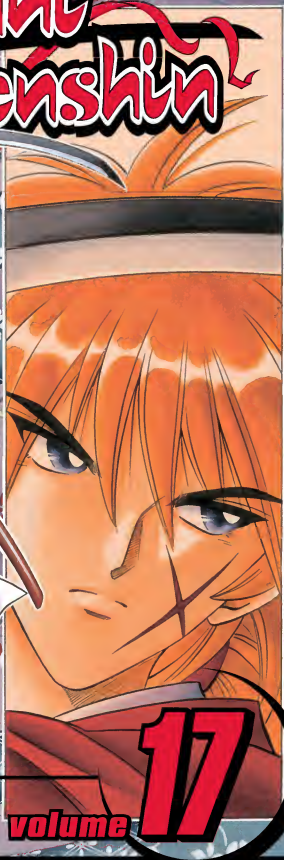


Rurouni Kenshin



SHONEN JUMP MANGA

Story & Art by

Nobuhiro Watsuki

volume

17

YEAH, AND YOU
ALSO LIVE IN THE
WORLD OF "WEAK,
NEAT; STRONG, EAT."
I'D BE CAREFUL,
IF I WERE YOU.

THERE'S STILL
THREE YEARS
TILL THE
21ST CENTURY,
THOUGH, SO I'VE
STILL GOT LOTS
OF TIME!



和月伸宏

NOBUHIRO WATSUKI



NEXT GENERATION

LOOKING AT HOW THINGS ARE GOING IN THE WORLD, AND LOOKING AT THE EVENTS GOING ON AROUND ME, RECENTLY THESE WORDS HAVE COME TO TAKE ON NEW RESONANCE. ALTHOUGH IT MAY FEEL TO ME LIKE TIME HAS STOPPED SINCE I TOOK ON THIS SERIES, HERE IT IS, ALREADY CLOSE TO BEING THE 21ST CENTURY...AND ME COMING UP FAST ON THE BIG 3-0. I'M STARTING TO FEEL PRETTY STRONGLY THAT IT'S WELL PAST TIME I CHARTED SOME NEW DIRECTIONS FOR MYSELF.

Rurouni Kenshin, which has found fans not only in Japan but around the world, first made its appearance in 1992, as an original short story in *Weekly Shonen Jump Special*. Later rewritten and published as a regular, continuing *Jump* series in 1994, *Rurouni Kenshin* ended serialization in 1999 but continued in popularity, as evidenced by the 2000 publication of *Yahiko no Sakabatô* ("Yahiko's Reversed-Edge Sword") in *Weekly Shonen Jump*. His most current work, *Busô Renkin* ("Armored Alchemist"), began publication in June 2003, also in *Jump*.

RUROUNI KENSHIN
VOL. 17: THE AGE DECIDES THE MAN
The SHONEN JUMP Graphic Novel Edition

STORY AND ART BY
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Rurouni Kenshin™



**MEIJI
SWORDSMAN
ROMANTIC
STORY**

**Vol.17
THE AGE
DECIDES
THE MAN**



**STORY & ART BY
NOBUHIRO WATSUKI**

相楽左之助



Sagara Sanosuke

神谷 薰



Kamiya Kaorn

斎藤 一



Saitō Hajime

四乃森蒼紫



Shinomori Aoshi

緋村剣心 (人斬り抜刀齋)



Himura Kenshin
(Hitokiri Battōsai)

佐渡島方治



Sadojima Hoji

駒形由美



Komagata Yumi



CAST



Once he was *hitokiri*, an assassin, called Battōsai. His name was legend among the pro-Imperialist or "patriot" warriors who launched the Meiji Era. Now, Himura Kenshin is *ronin*, a wanderer, and carries a reversed-edge *sakabatō* to prohibit himself from killing.

志々雄
雄真実



Shishio Makoto

THUS FAR

Kenshin has journeyed to Kyoto to black the machinations of Shishio Makoto, the man who took Kenshin's place as *hitokiri* or government-sanctioned slayer of men. In a duel with Sōjirō, one of the madman Shishio's *Juppangatana* "Ten Sword" assassins, Kenshin's former blade is broken and a new one is acquired—"Shinuchi," a *sakabatō* like the first.

Newly armed (and after an edge-of-death battle with his former *Hiten Mitsurugi* master, Hiko Seijūrō), Kenshin joins up with Sanosuke and Saitō so that they may foil the plans of Shishio to burn down Tokyo and attack it by cannon. Arriving at Shishio's lair at last, the three are met by Shishio's three hest: "Bright King" Anji, "Blind Sword" Usui, and the ever-smiling Sōjirō. After fierce battles, Anji is defeated by Sanosuke, and Usui dies against Saitō. Sōjirō, defeated by Kenshin despite the latter's vow never to kill, decides he must leave Shishio's side and seek the truth on his own terms.

Kenshin, already wounded from his duels with Anshi and Sōjirō, finally reaches the "Infernal Hall" and challenges its madman owner, who still is insisting that it is nature's law that the "weak become the sustenance of the strong." As Kenshin lies unconscious, struck down by Shishio's second "secret sword," *Guren Kaina*, who should burst in on the scene but Saitō....

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Act 139

Howling Laugh

仲宏
和月



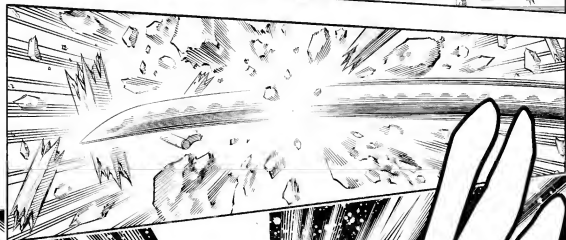


!!!!!!

KRAK!



SAITŌ!!

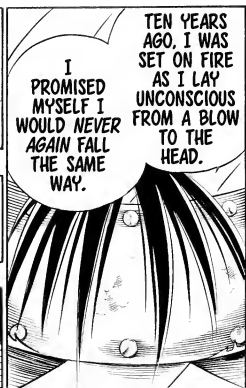


牙
突
!!

GATOTSU!!









THAT YOU
MANAGED
THE GATOTSU
DESPITE
THEM IS
IMPRESSIVE.

THOSE
WOUNDS ON
YOUR LEGS
MUST
BE FROM
USUI...

HOWEVER,
YOU ARE
DONE NOW.



LETTING
DOWN YOUR
GUARD
AGAIN?

FOOL!!
THE ONE WHO
OUGHT TO
HAVE DONE
RESEARCH IS
YOU!

GATOTSU...

牙突

零式

...ZERO-SHIKI!!!

!!



LET
DOWN MY
GUARD...?

I'M
JUST
TAKING
MY TIME.



NOT BAD...
FOR A
GOVERNMENT
DOG.

A POINT-
BLANK
GATOTSU,
HELD IN
RESERVE.



HUK...







FUTAE NO KIWAMI
"MASTERY OF
TWO LAYERS"!!

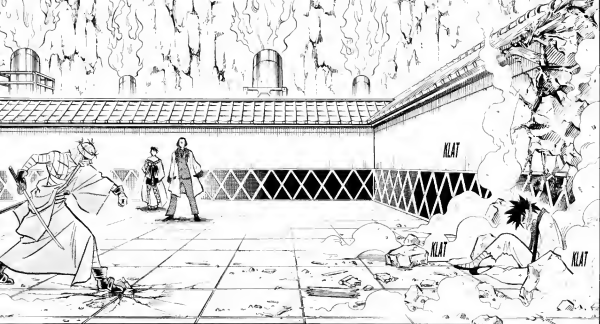
IF YOU
COME
AT ME...

HEH



...TO FILL
SOME
OF THIS
ENDLESS
GAP!!

...YOU
SHOULD
BE SURE,
FIRST...





HA-
A-A-
AH, HA-
HA-HA
HA-HA
!!!



FWAH,
HA,
HAH...



WAH,
HA,
HAH...

HAH,
HA,
HAH...

I DID
MISCALCULATE
ONE THING—
WITH LORD
SHISHIO, WE
WON'T HAVE
TO WAIT TEN
YEARS TO
TAKE THE
COUNTRY
!!

POWER!
POWER!
POWER!
POWER!
POWER!
POWER!

POWER
!!

FINISH
THEM!

FINISH
THEM,
SHISHIO-
SAMA!

THEY'RE
ONLY
COCKROACHES!

SORRY...

...BUT
THERE IS
NO VICTORY
HERE FOR
YOU YET.

DON'T RUSH ME.
I HAVEN'T
FOUGHT IN SO LONG.
LET ME SOAK IN
THE AFTERTASTE
OF VICTORY.



**AH, YES.
I FORGOT
THAT
THERE'S
YET...**

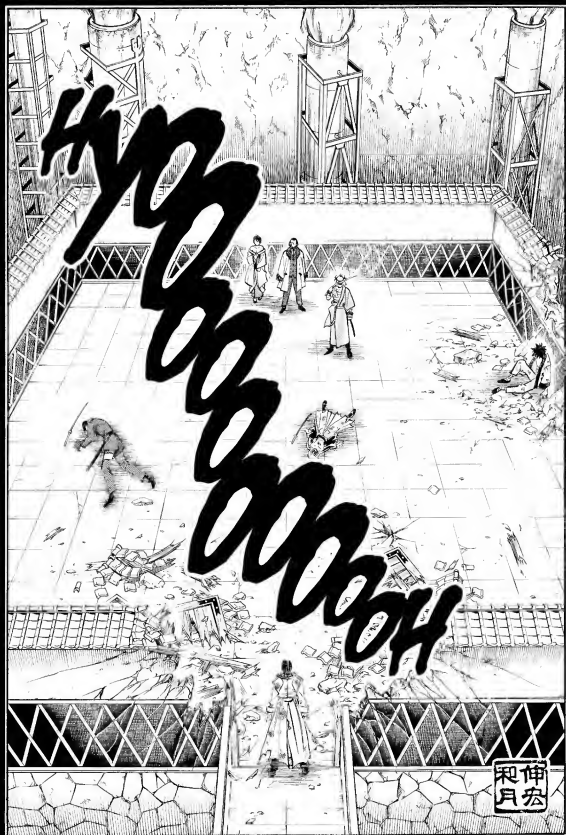
**...ONE
MORE DOG
TO BRING
TO HEEL.**

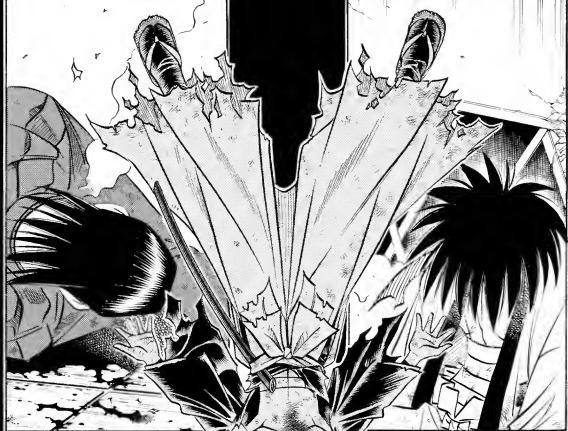


Rurouni Kenshin



Act 140—Thread of Life





...WISH
TO DIE
WITH THE
OTHERS?

SO,
THEN.
DOES THIS
LAST
DOG...





...DOG.

THAT
IS WHAT
YOU ARE,
AOSHI!

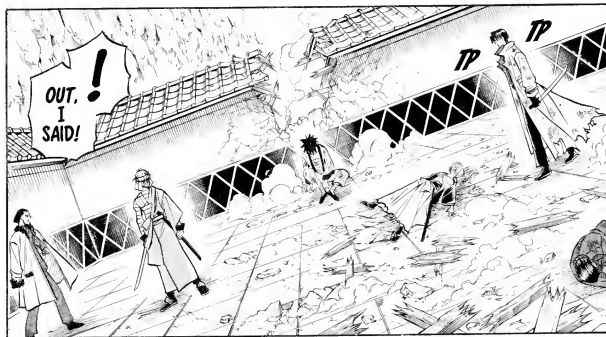


YOU
SHAME THIS
PLACE BY EVEN
ENTERING!
GET OUT!!



HAVEN'T
YOU ALREADY
BEEN
DEFEATED
BY HIMURA?!

WHAT
PLACE DO
YOU HAVE
IN THIS
BATTLE?!



AND SO,
IF WE'RE TO
DETERMINE
A TRUE
WINNER...

IN HIS
DUEL WITH
THIS LOSER,
BATTOSAI
TOOK
INJURIES...

...AND
SPENT ENERGY
THAT HE
OTHERWISE
WOULD NOT
HAVE.



THERE
WOULD
BE NO
DIFFERENCE
IN THE
OUTCOME!!

NONSENSE!
EVEN AT
HIS BEST,
BATTOSAI IS
NO MATCH
FOR SHISHIO-
SAMA!!

...BY
TAKING
HIS
PLACE.

YOU'LL
BALANCE
THE
SCALES...



HŌJI,
LET IT
BE.





I DON'T
CARE TO
LEAVE ANY
DOUBT...



...AS TO
THE TRUE
VICTOR
OF THIS
MATCH.

ZIP



WILL YOU
MAKE ME, TOO,
A BOUQUET
ON YOUR
ONIWABANSHŪ
HEADSTONE?

TUG

AS
THINGS
STAND,
IT IS I
WHO HAS
DEFEATED
HIMURA.



...



WAVER



...IS
NOW
BROKEN.

TUG

OUR
ALLIANCE...



**STRIKE
ME!!**

**YOU'RE
SO SLOW,
I CAN SEE
ALL YOUR—**

FEH.

**KA
KA
KA**



...EVEN WITH
HIS KODACHI,
AOSHI CANNOT
STRIKE!!

WSH

TOK

KNG

KEEN

HA!
AGAINST THE
ATTACKS OF
SHISHIO-
SAMA...



AOSHI IS
ON THE
DEFENSIVE!!





SHISHIO-SAMA...
BEHIND
YOU!!





御庭番衆式

小太刀二刀流

ONIWABANSHŪ-STYLE
DUAL KODACHI...

回天剣舞

六連!!!

KAITEN-KENBU
ROKUREN!!!

TOO
SLOW!!



YOUR
"ROKUREN"
SWORD-DANCE
REQUIRES SIX
SIMULTANEOUS
SLASHES...

KNH
...!

YOU
WEREN'T
EVEN CLOSE.

AFTER THAT,
ALL YOU
CAN KILL
NOW...

...IS
TIME!

AS I THOUGHT,
THE AMAKAKERU
RYŪ NO HIRAMEKI
HAS TAKEN YOUR
STRENGTH.

ZIA
ASH



**GNH
!!**

BUT STILL,
NO MATTER
HOW MUCH
TIME YOU
WASTE...

HOW
PITIFUL.
ONCE YOU
MIGHT HAVE
BEEN A
WARLORD.
NOW YOU'RE
ONLY
STALLING.

HEH

...IT'S
USELESS IF
BATTOSAI
CANNOT GET
TO HIS
FEET.



**H
W
O
K
K
K
K**



ASKED
"WHITE,"
OR "BLACK,"
ULTIMATELY,
YOU WILL
ALWAYS
CHOOSE
WHITE.

YOU MAY
RUN WITH A
DIFFERENT PACK,
SHINOMORI AOSHI,
BUT IN THE END,
YOU AND HIMURA
ARE THE SAME.

...YOUR
FATE WAS
ALREADY
SEALED.

AS SOMEONE
WHO CHOOSES
BLACK, WITHOUT
FEAR, THE
MOMENT YOU
MET ME...

...IS THAT
HE IS
WEAKER
THAN YOU!!

...THAT I
CANNOT
BELIEVE...

ARE BATTŌSAI
AND I ALIKE?
I DON'T KNOW.
BUT ONE
THING...







AND
THEN THIS
NATION
WILL BE
IN OUR
HANDS!!

HURRY!
THE
KILLING
BLOW!!

WORRY NOT,
SHISHIO-SAMA!
HIMURA IS BARELY
CONSCIOUS!!





**FINAL
BATTLE...
ROUND
TWO...**



WEH

BEGIN!



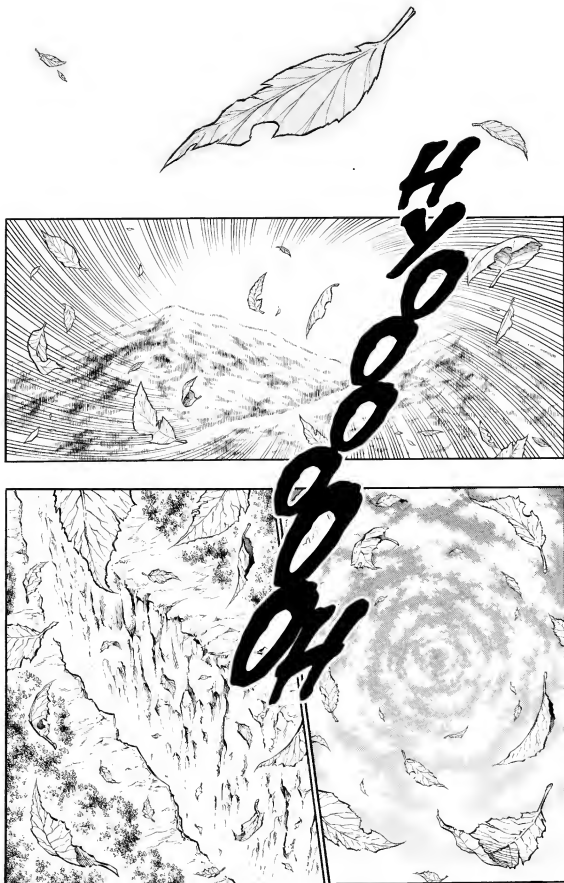
**NOT A ONE
OF US HAS HIS
FATE SEALED,
NOT WHEN...**



**...THERE
STILL IS
TIME FOR
HIM TO
FIGHT!!**

Rurouni Kenshin





Act 141
**Double-Edged
Flame**



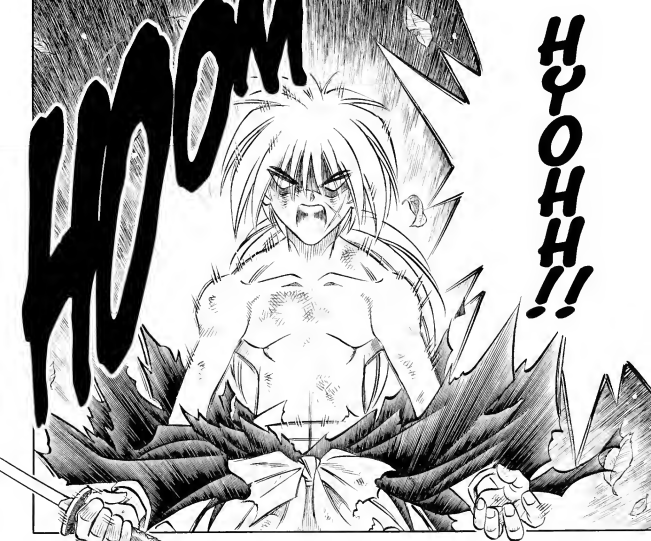
仲伸
和月



THIS CHILL!
THIS UNEASE!
THIS DREAD!!

AND
YET...





AND YET...
AND YET,
THIS MAN!!

I CANNOT
IMAGINE
SHISHIO-SAMA
LOSING...

HIMURA
BATTOSAI
IS BEYOND
MY UNDER-
STANDING!!

WE
MUSTN'T
UNDER-
ESTIMATE
HIM!!





YOU
HAD ME
WORRIED.

HEH

SO...
FINALLY
ON YOUR
FEET, HUH?

...NO USE
TO YOU
NOW.

EITHER
WAY,
I'M...

SLUMP

GUESS I'VE
NO CHOICE
BUT TO DO
WHAT YOU
SAID.

YOU DID
SAY I
WASN'T TO
INTERFERE...



**TO
MAKE ME
BURN YET
AGAIN!!**



PCH

AH,
HOW
THIS
BRINGS
ME
BACK...

PCH



PCH

YEARS
AGO, MY
FLESH AND
BLOOD...

...WERE
TRANSFORMED
INTO AN
INFERNO. NOW,
YOU RISE...



**YOU
HAVE TO
STOP IT!!**

**THIS
ISN'T
GOOD!!**

**GAA
AAB**

...HE CAN'T
REGULATE
HIS
TEMPERATURE...
HIS BODY
WILL HEAT
UP UNTIL...!!

DON'T YOU
REMEMBER?!
SHISHIO-
SAMA HAS
BURNS ALL
OVER...

'SCUSE
...

**IT'S
BEEN 15
MINUTES!**

OH!

...ME?

**IF HE
GOES
MUCH
FURTHER,
HE-!!**

HIS
TEMPERATURE
WILL ONLY
KEEP CLIMBING,
AND...

THE DOCTOR
SAYS HE CAN
ONLY MOVE AT
FULL-STRENGTH
FOR 15
MINUTES!

...AFTER
THAT, NO
ONE KNOWS
WHAT WILL
HAPPEN!!

HYAAH!







**BELIEVE,
YUMI!**

WHAT?!

**LORD
SHISHIO
CHOSE
US...**

**IT IS
OUR DUTY
TO TRUST
THE
MASTER.**



IF IT'S
HIS **INHUMAN**
HEAT THAT
GIVES SHISHIO-
SAMA HIS
POWER...

...THEN, THE
MORE HE BURNS,
THE STRONGER
HE WILL
GROW!!

THE
LOCOMOTIVE
HAS SHOWN
THIS NEW
AGE...

...THAT
HEAT
BRINGS
POWER!

USSSSS



BUT...HIS
BODY WILL
REACH A
LIMIT...

**WHAT
LIMIT?!**

WHAT LIMIT
CAN POSSIBLY
FAVOR HIMURA
AND DOOM
SHISHIO-
SAMA?!





CRAB



**IT'S
OVER
!!!**

...WITH
MY
GUREN
KAINA?!

OR HOW
ABOUT
ANOTHER
GLIMPSE
OF
DEATH...

IF IT'S PAIN
YOU NEED TO
BRING YOUR
STRENGTH...
SHALL I
HELP?

GUNG

NOT
YET...

IT'S NOT
ENOUGH.

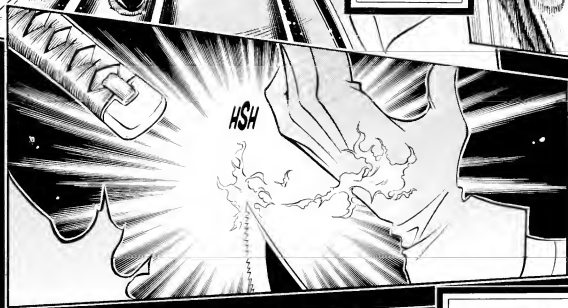
GUNG

THRE





FIFTEEN
MINUTES
SINCE
THEIR
BATTLE
BEGAN.



TO THEM,
"MEIJI"
COULD NOT
BE MORE
DIFFERENT,
THOUGH THEY
LIVED THE SAME
"BAKUMATSU."





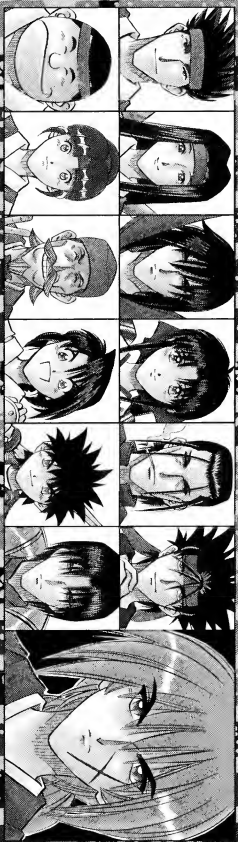
ONE
WAY OR
ANOTHER,
IT'S
ABOUT
TO END.

Rurouni Kenshin

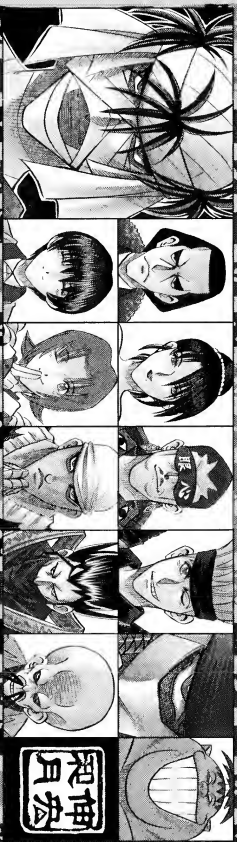




Act 142—Final Encounter



Act 142—Final Encounter



**BELIEVE!! NO
MATTER WHAT
BATTOSAI MAY
BRING FORTH,
MY LORD WILL
NOT FALL!**



**HE WILL
NOT—
CANNOT!!**



**SHISHIO-
SAMA!**



**HITEN
MITSURUGI-
RYŪ—**



ONE-
TWO
HIT!



HE
WON'T
LET
THIS
CHANCE
GO...



HE'LL
KEEP
COMING...



HYOH!!!



RYŪSUI
DRAGON
HAMMER!

龍槌!

翔閃!!

SHŌSEN
"FLIGHT
STRIKE!!"

RYÜKANSEN
"DRAGON
SPIRAL" •
"WINTRY
WIND"!!

龍卷閃

りゅう
かん
せん

「嵐」
こがらし

WHORL!!

「旋」
まわ

HYOO
ROO
ROO

嵐

あらし

!!!!

STORM!!

FIVE
HITS!!



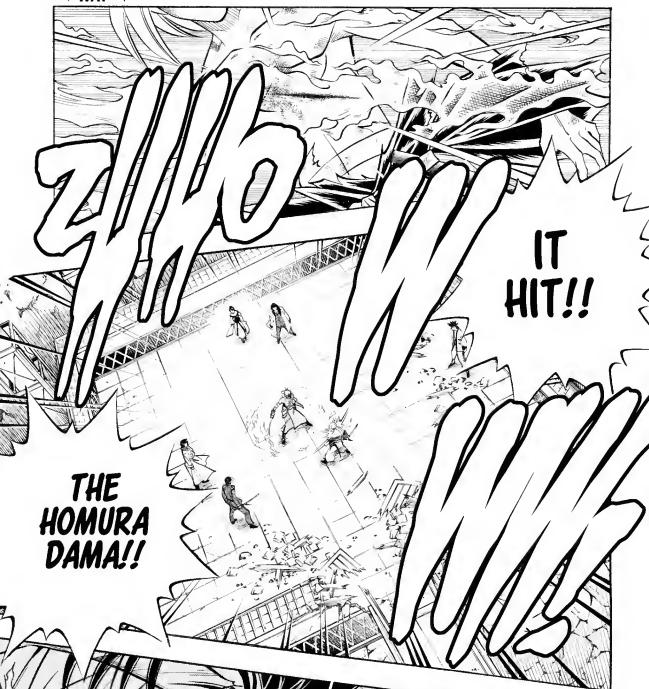
MM



IS
THAT
ALL
YOU
HAVE
?!

SHAAAH!!

YES-S-S!!



**BUT A WORLD THAT
WOULD FORCE SUCH
PAIN UPON THE
WEAK, WHO HAVE
NOT CHOSEN
BLOODSHED...**

GNG

**BUT...THE
HOMURA
DAMA
BURNS THE
WOUND...!**

**IT
DIDN'T
TAKE!!**

**THE MIND
CAN
OVERCOME
SUCH
PAIN...
ALL
WHO
CHOOSE
THE
LIFE OF
BATTLE
KNOW
THIS.**

**...THAT, I
WILL NOT
ALLOW!!**

**H
Y
O**

飛天御剣流

HITEN MITSURUGI-RYŪ...

KUZU-
RYUSEN
"NINE-
HEADED
DRAGON"!!

玖

...9.





...AND
MADE
SHISHIO-
SAMA
FALL.

AND YET, THIS
MAN, WITH HIS
DESIRE ONLY
TO PROTECT
THOSE WITHOUT
POWER, BORE THE
HOMURA DAMA,
COUNTERED THE
GUREN KAINA...

...SO HE IS
AFFECTED!
EACH STRIKE
OF SHISHIO-SAMA
LEADS HIM
CLOSER TO
DEATH.



HE
WAS NOT
WRONG.

MY LORD PUT
DEFEATING
THIS MAN
ON PAR WITH
CONQUERING
JAPAN...



...IS A TASK
AS GREAT
AS TAKING
THE
NATION!!

IT IS NOT
THAT THE
COUNTRY MUST
FALL IF WE
DEFEAT HIM.
IT'S THAT
DEFEATING
HIMURA
KENSIN...





SEE
THEM
LEAP
AND
DANCE!!

THE
FLAMES...

WHAT
IS
THIS?!



SHI—

FINAL
ROUND.



HERE
COMES.



THEY RESPOND
TO SHISHIO'S
ENERGY, JUST
AS THE LEAVES
SHATTERED
FOR KENSHIN...

"JUST AS"?
LEAVES AND
FLAMES AREN'T
QUITE THE
SAME THING.





KAGUZUCHI.

THE
FINAL
SECRET
MOVE.



Rurouni Kenshin



KENSHIN'S
STILL
GOT A
"FINAL"
MOVE
HIMSELF...

MM?

SHAKE
SHAKE

YUMI
DOESN'T
UNDERSTAND—
THIS MUST BE
SHISHIO-SAMA'S
FINEST MOVE!

THE
FINAL
"SECRET
SWORD"...

KAGUZHCHI!!

Act 143—The Third Secret

BUT CAN
HE PULL
IT OFF
IN HIS
CURRENT
STATE?

HHHH

HITEN
MITSURUGI-
RYŪ END
MOVE...

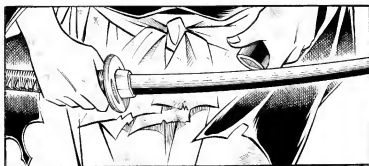
AMA-
KAKERU
RYŪ NO
HIRAMEKI
!!

EITHER WAY...
THIS WILL
BE THE
LAST STRIKE!

**Act
143
The
Third
Secret**

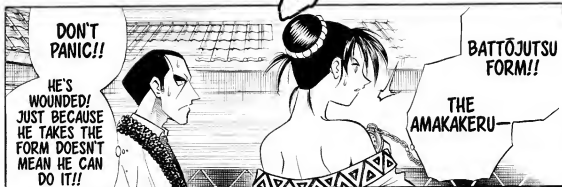


神月



HAA...

HAA...



DON'T
PANIC!!

HE'S
WOUNDED!
JUST BECAUSE
HE TAKES THE
FORM DOESN'T
MEAN HE CAN
DO IT!!

BATTŌJUTSU
FORM!!

THE
AMAKAKERU—



...IS A
FORM
BASED ON
THE LEFT
FOOT!

AMAKAKERU
RYŪ NO
HIRAMEKI...



AND,
EVEN IF HE
DOES, THE
SECRET OF THE
MOVE...

...HAS
ALREADY
BEEN
REVEALED
BY
SŌJIRO!

GASP!



...AN
INSTANT
THAT
SHISHIO-
SAMA IS
CERTAIN
NOT TO
MISS!!

RIGHT OR
LEFT, IT'S
JUST ONE
INSTANT...



AND YET,
IF YOU WISH
TO SPEAK OF
TIME, SHISHIO,
YOU MUST
KNOW THE AGE
OF THE
HITOKIRI IS
LONG SINCE
PAST.

FOR
THIS ONE,
THERE IS
LITTLE "FUN"...
ACCOMPLISHED
AS YOU MAY
BE.

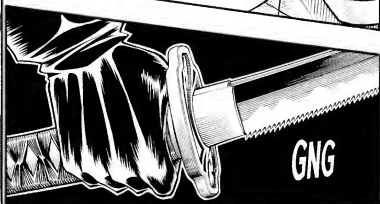
NOT
SINCE THE
BAKUMATSU,
SURELY. AND
YET, I DO
STILL HAVE A
COUNTRY TO
CONQUER, SO,
I'M OUT OF
TIME TO PLAY
WITH YOU.

I DON'T
KNOW WHEN
I'VE HAD
SO MUCH
FUN.

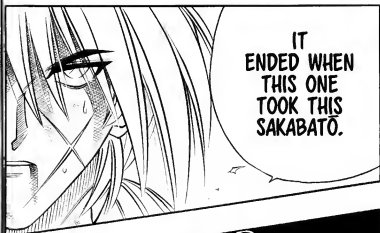




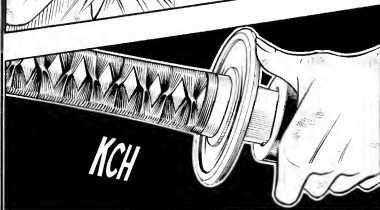
SO LONG AS
I BEAR THIS
"MUGENJIN," IT
SHALL NEVER
END!



IT
ENDED WHEN
THIS ONE
TOOK THIS
SAKABATŌ.



...NOW.







...OR
THE
LEFT?

THE
RIGHT?



THE
LEFT!!

あま かなる ひらめき
天翔龍閃!!
りゅうの

AMAKAKERU RYŪ NO HIRAMEKI!!





BLOCK!!



NNRGH !!

NCH!

HYAAAH!!

DEFLECTED!!

...TO THE
TIP OF THE
BLADE...

FROM
THE
BASE...

...THE FULL
FIRE OF
"MUGENJIN"...

...RELEASED
!!

THE
AMAKAKERU RYŪ
NO HIRAMEKI
IS DEFEATED!!

終の秘劍

FINAL
SECRET
SWORD...

火産靈神!!!!

KAGUZUCHI!!





WHAT...



WHAT
IS-?!

...IN
HELL
?!

THE AIR
PUSHED OUT
BY THE
DEFLECTION
OF THE FIRST
STRIKE...

I'M
BEING
SUCKED
INTO...

AM I
BEING
PULLED
IN?

...BY
BATTOSAI?!

NO!
IT'S...

...HAS
CREATED A
VACUUM,
SUCKING
OBJECTS
INTO IT!!

...THE
SPACE
IN
FRONT
OF US!!

CHH!!



**...ARE ALL
BASED ON
TWO-STEP
ATTACKS!!**

**THE
BATTŌJUTSU
OF
HITEN
MITSURUGI-
RYŪ.....**

ALSO!

**THE AMAKAKERU
RYŪ NO HIRAMEKI
IS "SHINSOKU"
GOD-SPEED
BATTŌJUTSU...**

Rurouni Kenshin



Act 144—Shape of Love

SSP

HERE
YOU GO,
KAORU-
SAN.

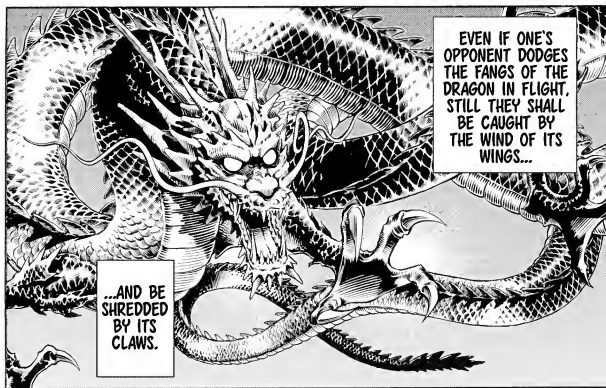
TH-
THANK
YOU.

NAH. THIS
IS NOTHING
COMPARED TO
THE BOSHIN
WAR.

IT'S
GONE,
ALL OF
IT...

HEY,
NOT SO
HIGH, YOU
TWO!!
YOU'RE NOT
WELL!

...



IT'S THE
SAME AS
WHEN I
THINK ABOUT
AOSHI-SAMA...

BLUSH

I DON'T
KNOW WHAT
YOU SEE
IN HIM.

PEW

AS FOR
ME, I
CAN'T STOP
WORRYING...

P
W
O
P

FIND 100
PEOPLE, AND
YOU'LL FIND
100 FORMS
OF LOVE.

LOVE IS
DIFFERENT
FOR EACH
OF US,
YAHIKO-
KUN.

MM-HM
MM-HM

THERE'S
NOTHING
I' CAN
ABO—

THE
SHAPE OF
LOVE...IS EVER
CHANGING.

I MEAN,
AREN'T
YOU THE
LEAST BIT
EMBARR—

Act 144
Shape
of
Love

RUROUNI
KENSHIN

るるに 剣心

駒形 由美

KOMAGATA
YUMI

和伸
月宏





GYAH!

天翔
龍閃

りゅうのひらめき

あま
がける

KOKOKO

AMAKAKERU RYU
NO HIRAMEKI!





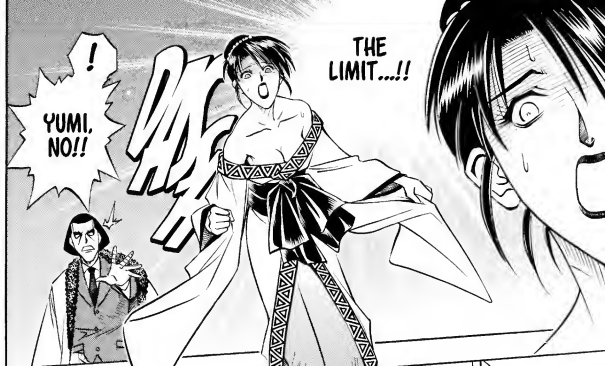
FIRST, THE STEPPING IN—
THE DRAWING OF THE
BLADE—THE CENTRIFUGAL
FORCE OF THE SPIN—
AND FINALLY, THE
VACUUM AND THE
SECOND STEP.

THE BLOW'S
SECOND STRIKE
CONCENTRATES
ITS POWER FAR
BEYOND THAT
FIRST STRIKE
WHICH I
EXPERIENCED.

IT
HIT HIM
HARD?







YUMI,
NO!!

THE
LIMIT....!!

BECAUSE OF THE TERRIBLE
BURNS THAT COVER HIS
ENTIRE BODY, SHISHIO-SAMA
MUST FIGHT NO MORE THAN
15 MINUTES!

STOP!



K
S
H



HE
MUSTN'T
GO ANY
FURTHER!!





AH...

ZKK



TOO EASY,
BATTOSAI.

THIS
BATTLE
IS NOT
YET
OVER.



...WHO
LOVES
YOU?!

...YOU
BETRAY
THE
ONE...

HAH!

YOU'VE NO
RIGHT TO
SPEAK OF IT.



...FOR
VICTORY,
WOULD...

SHISHIO,
YOU...

... "BETRAY,"
IS IT?

SHE KNOWS
ME LIKE NO
ONE ELSE...

AS I
UNDERSTAND
HER.



I WAS
ALWAYS
JEALOUS
OF...THE
BOY AND...
KAMATARI.

FOR
THE FIRST
TIME,
I...WAS
USEFUL, IN
BATTLE...

I'M...
HAPPY...



...ALL I
COULD DO...
WAS TEND
TO HIS
PLEASURE.



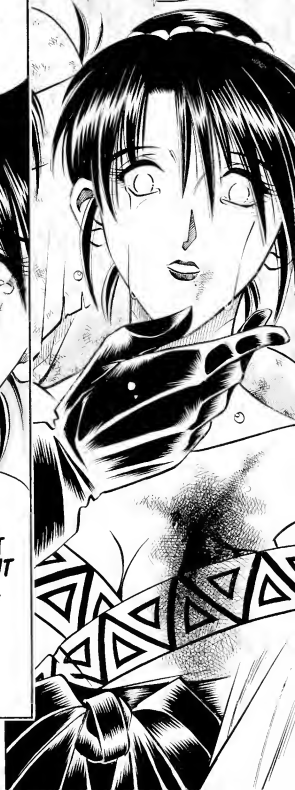
TO MY
LORD,
COMBAT
IS ALL,
AND YET...



I WAS...SO
ASHAMED...
FRUSTRATED.

IN...
THE MOST
IMPORTANT
BATTLE...
OF MY
LORD'S
LIFE.

BUT
NOW...
NO.

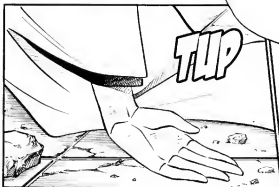


...SHISHIO-
SAMA.

YOU
MUST
WIN...



I GO
AHEAD...TO
AWAIT YOU...
IN HELL.





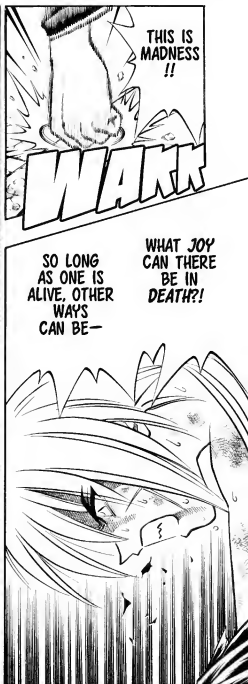
KOMAGATA
YUMI, THE MOST
UNFORTUNATE
OF WOMEN...

YET SHE
FOUND JOY
AT THE
END.



IT IS NOT
OUR ROLE TO
DEBATE LIFE
AND DEATH.
OURS IS
BUT TO
FIGHT.

GUH...



THIS IS
MADNESS
!!

SO LONG
AS ONE IS
ALIVE, OTHER
WAYS
CAN BE—

WHAT JOY
CAN THERE
BE IN
DEATH?!



HE WHO
STANDS FIRST
AND DELIVERS
THE NEXT
BLOW...

...HE WHO
SURVIVES...WILL
CLAIM
VICTORY!!



...KENSIN...!

The Secret Life of Characters (40) —Komagata Yumi—

Personality-wise, she has no model. Essentially, as her name suggests, she's a version of the character "Ogin" (played by actress Yumi Kaoru) in the *Mitokōmon* spin-off series, *Mitokōmon Gaiden: Kagerō Ninpō-Chō*. Initially created to be "sexy" and nothing else, one might almost say she wasn't a character at all, but an accessory for Shishio; after all, a proper villain always has a temptress or two hanging off his arm, right? Imagine my surprise to see her developing into a character so motivated by love....

The way she died brought both compliments and complaints, but as I had conceived of happiness for Yumi as accompanying Shishio everywhere, it struck me that "everywhere" would also include Hell. (Kenshin may say, "What joy is there in death?" but for Yumi the point isn't death, it's being with her love.) And how boring for Shishio to be surrounded only by middle-aged types like Hōji and Usui anyway!

In terms of design, I can't say there's a model. As I've said, her only function was to be sexy, so I designed her on the spot. Halfway through, though, I became hooked on the character "Morrigan" from *Vampire Hunter*, and thus kept exposing more and more of the shoulders and cleavage, eventually increasing the sexiness by about 120%. I've heard that fans who try and dress as her for "cosplay" have a difficult time keeping the top up; sorry about that.

I always have had trouble drawing women and, honestly speaking, this time I'd just about given up. What drawing Yumi helped me realize was, fun can be had not just in making them cute, but also in making them seductive, or even evil. With Yumi's sexed-up body, messing up even one line could lead to her looking downright indecent, which taught its own lessons....while also driving home to me my relative inexperience. In that sense, Yumi was quite a tutor in the importance of skillful sketching.





IN THE END, IT
COMES DOWN NOT
TO A CLASH OF
FORCE OR A
CONTEST OF SKILL,
BUT A RACE
AGAINST THE
RAPID EBBING
OF LIFE.

Act 145 Duel of an Era



THE BATTLE TO
END ALL THEIR
BATTLES—THE ONE
TO DECIDE THE
FATE OF THE
AGE—IS AT LAST
COMING TO A
CLOSE.



THE AGE
WILL DECIDE
THE MAN—
WHOM WILL
IT BE?







THE
MATCH
MUST
GO TO
SHISHIO!!



AFTER ALL
THAT, TO
STILL HAVE
SO MUCH
POWER...

KENSHIN
!!



AS THOUGH
DRAINING...OUT,
ALONG WITH
THE BLOOD...

ROLL

NO...
STRENGTH
LEFT TO...



...NEVER...
SO CLOSE
AS NOW.

DEATH
HAS
NEVER...
BEEN FAR
AWAY, AND
YET...



NNG...

HH





...MUST
BE
DEATH,
TRULY.

HH

THIS...

HH

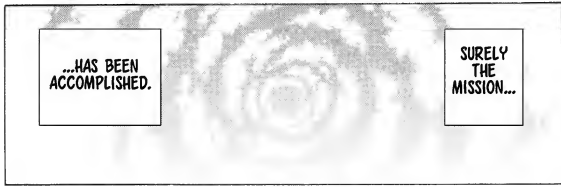


HH



EVEN IF HE
RECOVERS AND
RISES AGAIN IN A
FEW YEARS...THOSE
WHO CARRY THE
NEW ERA ON THEIR
SHOULDERS WILL
HAVE GROWN
STRONGER, TOO...
AND WILL STOP
HIM.

AND YET,
THIS BATTLE...
HAS COST
SHISHIO MOST
OF HIS
POWER,
AS WELL.



...HAS BEEN
ACCOMPLISHED.

SURELY
THE
MISSION...

TO
PROTECT
JAPAN...

TO
PROTECT
KYOTO...

...AND
...

KENSHIN...

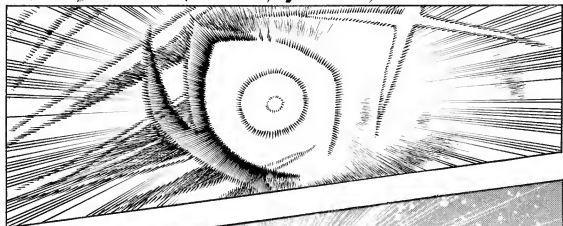
IF YOU DIE HERE,
YOU WILL MAKE A
GIRL WHO CAME TO
KYOTO WITH THE
HOPE ONLY OF
SEEING YOU VERY
UNHAPPY.





LET'S
GO
HOME...

...TO
TOKYO,
ALL OF
US...



...TOGETHER...





HH

NO
DEATH!
NOT NOW,
NOT YET!!

OTHER
LIVES DEPEND
ON ME—
MY LIFE
IS NOT
JUST MINE!

HH

HH



...THAN A
WILL TO
LIVE!!

AND
NOTHING
IS
STRONGER...



SHISHIO
MAKOTO IS
STRONGER
STILL!!



...

NO.

IT'S
WHY I
SHALL
YET
LIVE!!

THE STRONG
LIVE! THE
WEAK DIE!
IT'S THE
ONLY LAW
THERE
IS!!

YES,
SHISHIO-
SAMA,
YES!!

THE
LIMIT!

YOU
HAVE
BEATEN
IT!!

FISH!





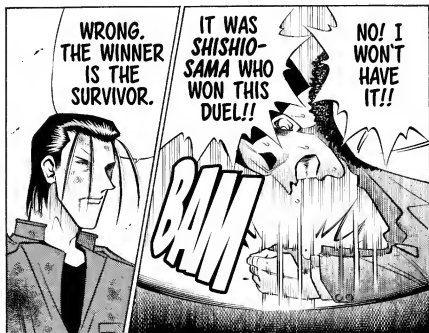
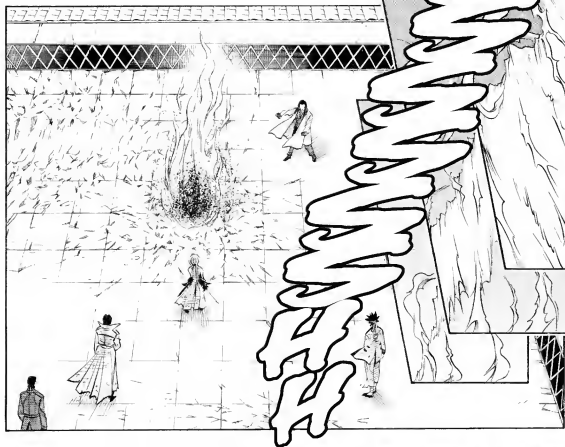




NYAH...

NYAH,
HA,
HAH...

NYAHH,
HAH, HAH,
HAH!!



THE AGE...

IT'S
WHAT HE
HIMSELF
SAID.

THE
STRONG
LIVE AND
THE WEAK
DIE...

...HAS NOT
ALLOWED
SHISHIO TO
CONTINUE.

THE FLOW
OF TIME
CONNECTING
THE PAST AND
PRESENT...

...HAS
DECIDED
WHICH
MAN WILL
SURVIVE.



Rurouni Kenshin





AND SO SHISHIO
MAKOTO, THE
DEMON WHO
COMMANDED
THE FLAMES,
DISAPPEARED INTO
THEM WITH
HOWLS OF
LAUGHTER.

Act 146
The Passion of Hōji



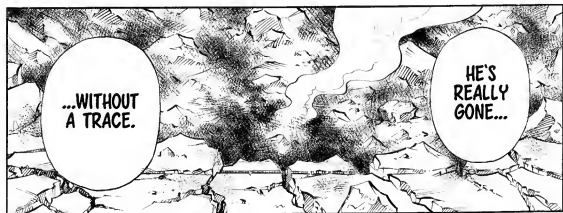
...LOST
TO ALL.

THE
MEANING
OF THAT
LAUGHTER...



Act 146

The Passion of Hōji





HE
DIDN'T
LOSE! HE
CAN'T
LOSE!!

SHISHIO-
SAMA IS
INCAPABLE
OF
LOSING
!!





...HE'S
GONE
MAD...



UWAH-
H-H-
H-H!!

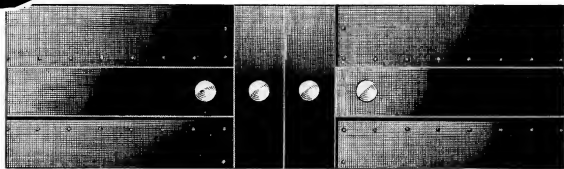
WEE
GASH!



BLOP

KENSHIN!!

W





HMPH.

SOOP







IF YOU ALL DIE,
THERE IS NO
VICTOR! IF YOU
ALL DIE, SHISHIO-
SAMA REMAINS
INVINCIBLE!!





SHISHIO-
SAMA
ALONE
TAKES
THE
DAY!!

S...

SAITŌ
!!





I JUST
DON'T
WANT
YOU TO
TAKE
OFF,
YOU—!!

ARGH!

WELL,
SAITŌ?!



WHAT
ABOUT
OUR
DUEL,
HUH?!



BYE.



I'VE
LIVED
THROUGH MORE
BLOODSHED
THAN
YOU TWO
COMBINED.



DID
YOU NOT
HEAR
WHAT I
SAID?



SAITOO!

HA
HA
HA





ALONG
WITH
YUMI-
SAN...



AH, SO
SHISHIO-SAMA
DID DIE.



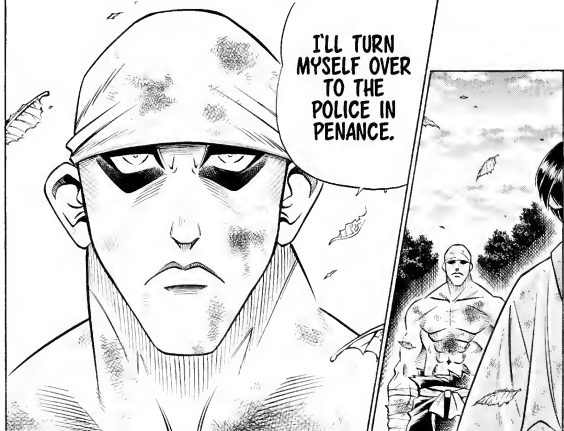
WHERE
WILL
YOU GO?

I'LL BE
TAKING MY
LEAVE NOW.



...I HAD
BETTER
GET GOING.

NO
IDEA.
BUT
IF I'M TO
DISCOVER
THE TRUTH
OF LIFE...



I'LL TURN
MYSELF OVER
TO THE
POLICE IN
PENANCE.



IF YOU
STILL WANT
TO DIE, I
WON'T STOP
YOU.

WHAT
ABOUT
YOU?



FOR
SHISHIO-
SAMA...

...AND
FOR THIS
COUNTRY.

BUT NOT
FOR ANY
"PENANCE"
!!

GRIT

I'LL TURN
MYSELF IN,
TOO...

I'LL AWAKEN
THOSE GRAZING
CATTLE IN THE
GOVERNMENT
TO THE
NEED FOR
STRENGTH!!

I SHALL
USE THEIR
COURTS
TO
RECOUNT
THIS
BATTLE!!



...DAMN HIM!



DAMN
SAITŌ!



HE
SHOULD'VE
LET ME
KILL
HIM...

...NOT
SOME
STUPID
BLAST!!



“FREE TALK”〈PART I〉

Long time no see! Watsuki here. The water heater at work broke, forcing us to move again, and my repainted version of the Zombie Spawn figure is nowhere to be found. Despite such perils of everyday life, I am doing fairly well. Somehow.

I want to say more about the two complaints I touched on in the previous Free Talk.

First, regarding something I wrote in volume 14....

I received a few complaints saying Watsuki had talked about wives and maids as if they were the same thing. I can see how my words might have been taken that way. I was preoccupied with keeping a limit on the number of characters I used, not paying much attention to the subtleties. Those who were offended, I sincerely apologize.

Second, regarding my views of Yamanami Keisuke, the leader of Shinsengumi.

This is a combination of Watsuki using too few words, and not paying attention to the tone. To clarify the parts where I was lacking, I'd say "when making Hijikata Toshizō the protagonist" a villain; and I'd say "antagonist," and not "villain." I apologize. Writing stories, especially ones involving battles of life or death, can't be done without an antagonist. This changes very quickly depending on who the protagonist is. (For example, if we rewrite "*Ruroken*" as a picaresque drama with Shishio as the protagonist, Kenshin would be the antagonist). Even if you say that the Shinsengumi was a historical reality and not "just a story," you can't deny that we like the Shinsengumi because of the stories involving them. (Watsuki hasn't once met anyone who said they fell in love with the Shinsengumi by looking at a historical timeline!) Please think about this a bit, and using the corrections I've made above, reread the original passage. For those of you who are still upset, I can't do anything more. Watsuki will not deny you your feelings, so please move on and forget all about him, thinking of his words as the mumblings of an idiot, and love the Shinsengumi in your own separate ways. But those of you who have quelled your anger...let's love the Shinsengumi together!



Act 147

Kyoto Epilogue

Fate of the Juppongatana (Part I)





AND...



TING-
A
LING

IT'S BEEN
A MONTH
SINCE THE
BATTLE
AGAINST
SHISHIO...

THE RAIN
HAS PASSED...
SUMMER
HAS COME...





ARGH! I CAN'T USE CHOPSTICKS WITH MY LEFT HAND...

MAKE—
ROOM—
STOP
SPINNING—

DEFEAT OF SHISHIO
AND PROTECTION OF
KYOTO DAY 31
AND COUNTING

WELL DONE.

I'M SO
SORRY...

TRUE.
THAT.

BESIDES,
SLEEPING
THROUGH
THE VICTORY
PARTY IS
GETTING
HARDER BY
THE DAY...

AOSHI-
SAMA!!
WHERE
ARE YOU?!

SOKAY.



"INFESTING,"
MORE LIKE.

WUZ
WITH
THE "♡"? ♡

...WE'RE
BOARDING
AT SAE'S
"SHIROBEKO."

UNTIL
AOI-YA IS
FULLY
RESTORED...



THANK
YOU FOR THE
MEDICAL
ATTENTION.

MEGUMI-
DONO.

WHEN SHE
HEARD THAT
KENSHIN HAD
BEEN HURT,
MEGUMI-SAN
CAME RIGHT
AWAY.

YOU'RE
WELCOME. BUT
DON'T LET
YOUR GUARD
DOWN YET.

KENSHIN
WAS AT
DEATH'S
DOOR.

...THEY
HAD
COME
BACK
TO US.

THAT NIGHT,
AS THE
SUN SET
AND THE
MOON
ROSE...

NOTHING
I SAID
SEEMED
TO REACH
HIM.



BUT
NOW...

SAE-DONO,
MAY THIS
ONE ASK FOR
A CUP OF...?

RIGHT
AWAY!



OKINA
!!

THIS
CALLS
FOR A
SONG!!

HRK!

MIC

YAY!

HEY,
YOU LOT!
HIMURA-KUN'S
AWAKE!!

WHERE
ARE YOU,
AOSHI-
SAMA?!



PURI'ISU TERU MI-I-!!

I
SAID,
WHERE
THE
HECK
IS-?!



AGAIN?!
WHAT'S
HE DO
THERE?!

AT HIS
ZEN TEMPLE,
AS ALWAYS.

HE HAS
MUCH TO
SORT OUT,
MISAO...

BEST
LEAVE HIM
TO IT.



BECAUSE
IT'S FOR
HIM.

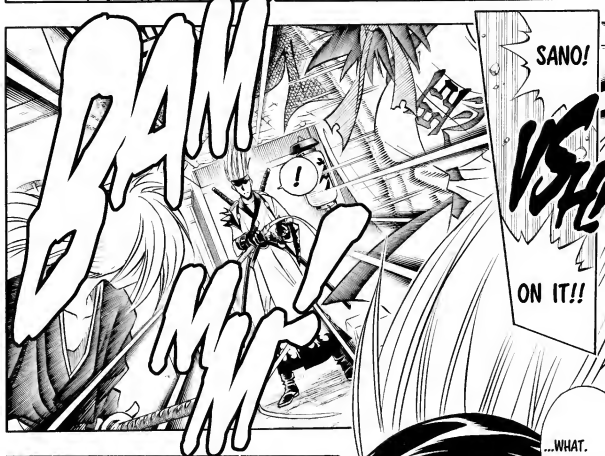
WHY
SHOULD
I?!

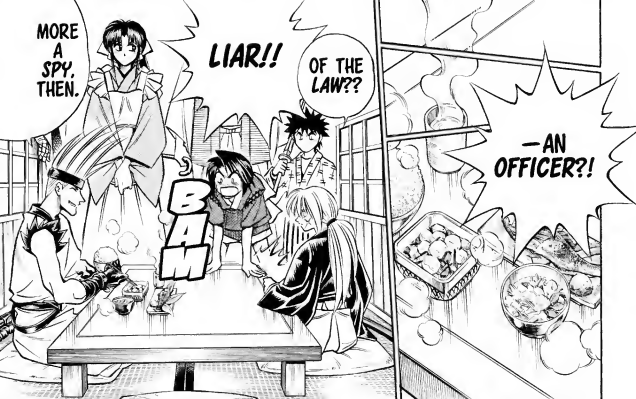


SO THIS
IS WHERE
THEY'RE
HUDDLING.

WELL,
WELL...







CHARMING
AS EVER,
**BIRD
HEAD.**

I'VE
COME TO
TELL WHAT'S
HAPPENED
WITH THE
CAPTURED
JUPPON-
GATANA.

SO, WHAT
BRINGS
YOU HERE,
**BROOM
HEAD?**

WHO'S A
WEASEL?!

I'M GONNA—!!

MMNG!



TELL US,
THEN.

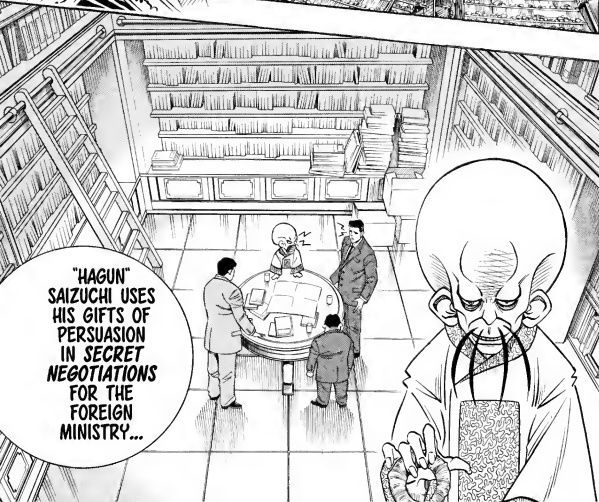
...WELL?

PARDONED,
CONSCRIPTED INTO
GOVERNMENT SERVICE
FOR THEIR
EXTRAORDINARY
ABILITIES, AND
ASSIGNED TO
VARIOUS POSTS.

MOST
ARE LIKE
ME.



**"FLIGHTED"
HENYA IS NOW
AN ARMY SCOUT,
STUDYING EVENTS
IN ASIA FROM
THE SKIES.**



**"HAGUN"
SAIZUCHI USES
HIS GIFTS OF
PERSUASION
IN SECRET
NEGOTIATIONS
FOR THE
FOREIGN
MINISTRY...**



MY
LORD IS
GONE...?

TRUE. THE
WOUND ITSELF
ISN'T BAD.
IT'S HER
HEART THAT
SUFFERS.

SHE HASN'T
BEEN THE
SAME SINCE
HEARING OF
SHISHIO-SAMA'S
DEATH.

THEN
PERHAPS...
...I OUGHT
TO DIE
TOO.



WHAT'S
THE
POINT OF
LIVING?!

WHAT
?

LOOK, YOU
WANNA DIE,
YOU GO
AHEAD.
BUT
SHISHIO-SAMA
WON'T LIKE
IT.

DON'T
BE
STUPID.



SHOULD WE LOSE IN COMBAT, HE SAID, WE WERE TO REMAIN ALIVE—TO TELL THE TRUE STORY OF OUR LORD, TO PREVENT THE MEIJI GOVERNMENT FROM REWRITING IT AS IT SEES FIT.

YOU CAME TO KYOTO LATE, SO MAYBE YOU DIDN'T HEAR, BUT THE MISSION OF THE JUPPONGATANA DIDN'T END WITH SERVING SHISHIO-SAMA IN LIFE. WE HAVE A SECOND CALLING.



WE KANSAI PEOPLE TELL JOKES—BUT NOT LIES!



...YOU LIE.

IT'S WHAT YUMI WOULD HAVE DONE IF SHE'D LIVED... AND THE BOY, TOO, IF HE'D STAYED.

YES...A MINSTREL...

"LET HER BE MY FINEST MINSTREL," HE SAID, AND LAUGHED.

SHISHIO-SAMA KNEW YOU HAD FEELINGS FOR HIM.





HE
DIDN'T
SAY A
WORD
OF IT.

TO THINK
SHISHIO MAKOTO
WOULD SAY
SUCH A
THING...

SHOULD
I...BE
RELIEVED
?

DON'T
BE
STUPID.

LIFE'S
FUNNY,
HUH?



MNCH
MNCH

I FIGURE,
HEY! SO LONG
AS SHE'S
ALIVE, AT
LEAST SHE'S
NOT DEAD.



...YOU'RE
A WISE
MAN.

HEH



SHE CAN'T
GO ON
UNLESS SHE
BELIEVES HE
WANTS HER
TO.

KAMATARI
CAN'T EVEN
IMAGINE A
LIFE WITHOUT
SHISHIO-
SAMA...

HE'D
NEVER GO
ALONG WITH ANY
GOVERNMENT
DEAL.

I DON'T
CARE ABOUT
THE REST OF
THEM, BUT...WHAT
HAPPENED TO
ANJI?



TWENTY-FIVE
YEARS
IS...A LONG
TIME.



AND
WHAT
OF THE
OTHER?



THE
ONE WHO
WITNESSED
THE DUEL
AGAINST
SHISHIO...
THE MOST
LOYAL
OF HIS
FOLLOWERS.



"BRIGHT KING"
ANJI AVOIDED
EXECUTION,
THANKS TO YOUR
INTERVENTION...
BUT, BY HIS
OWN CHOICE,
HE'LL PAY FOR
HIS DEEDS.

HE'S IN
A HOKKAIDO
PRISON AS
WE SPEAK,
SERVING A
25-YEAR
SENTENCE.



"FREE TALK" <PART II>

Free Talk Part II. There are so many things I want to write about (all stupid, of course) that I'll just list them.

The nature of "*Polygon Samu Sup!*" is being slowly revealed. It's a hit disappointing that the number of characters has gone down, but the Ninja (Hanzō, Garn, Sōgetsu, Kagetsu) have exceeded the Samurai (Haōmaru, Ukyō, Genjūrō)!! (Hanma doesn't use a sword, and is excluded. Shiki uses swords, but the hair color is too different, so we'll exclude him too.) Even so, I'm still really anticipating it. Oh, but I'm still anticipating... the 2D version....

From the same SNK suddenly appeared "*Gekka no Kenshi*." It's set in Bakumatsu, which is enough for Watsuki, who's dreamed of a Bakumatsu version of "*Samu Sup!*" (I literally had a dream. Haōmaru's descendant was a Shinsengumi member, Genjūrō's descendant was a hitokiri who's killed 1,000 people, and Nakoruru for some reason was just Nakoruru. I woke up right before I was about to play it. I was heartbroken.) It's going head to head with the "*Samu Sup!*" series... I hope they're both fun games.

Recently, I've received fan letters with "print club" photos on them. When I first got one from a friend, I thought, "What's so fun about this?" But it's getting to be fun looking at them. Still, I'd hate having one taken of myself. I hate getting photos taken... But I do have some interest in taking photos. People and scenery can add to my drawing experience. I don't have the time or the knowledge at the moment, but I think I'll get hooked soon. Those of you who have confidence in your looks, contact me about modeling!

Speaking of being hooked, I'm hooked on sunsets. I never get bored watching them. But they just built a huge apartment building in front of the building where I work, so I can't see any sunsets now. Then, as I was thinking, "Damn it!" about that building, I discovered that at night it has lights that go on in the pathways and the gate, creating a very nice effect. But as soon as I started thinking, "The world balances itself out," we had to move. Damn it!

A little while ago, I finally saw the theatrical version of *Evangelion* (I'm writing this in August). It was obvious that the people who created it didn't love the story or the characters, so I'm a little disappointed. But the dramatization, the movement, and the editing were superb. When the story led into the self-improvement seminar, I was nearly fooled for an instant. I don't know if most people enjoyed it, but as a writer, I was able to take home something from it.

"*Rurouni Kenshin*," in the magazine, is building to a climax. The story digs deeper and deeper now, so it's not easy for me as a writer. But I have to get over that if I'm going to develop themes in "*RuroKen*" like I want. I believe in happy endings in entertainment, and I'm working hard toward that, so please honor me with your support! See you in the next volume!





Act 148
Kyoto Epilogue
Fate of the
Juppongatana (Part II)

和伸
月宏



HE WAITED
FOR HIS DAY IN
COURT TO PRAISE
TO THE WORLD
SHISHIO-SAMA AND
HIS CODE OF LIFE.

ANJI SAVED
HIM AFTER
THE BATTLE, AND
HE TURNED
HIMSELF OVER
TO THE POLICE.

YEAH.



HE NEVER
GOT THE
CHANCE TO
SPEAK
PUBLICLY.

IN THE
END, THOUGH,
HE DIDN'T GET
A TRIAL.



...THAT THIS
PARTICULAR SHADOW
OF THE BAKUMATSU
STAY THERE,
WITHOUT
RESURFACING.

NO. OF COURSE
NOT. THE MEIJI GOV'T
WOULD FEAR SHISHIO
IN DEATH AS
WELL AS IN LIFE.
THOSE IN POWER
WOULD PREFER...

NEEDLESS
TO SAY, THE
GOV'T COULD USE
A GUY LIKE
THAT.

"FORGET
ABOUT SHISHIO,"
THEY SAID. "AND
SWEAR US YOUR
LOYALTY. THEN
WE'LL GUARANTEE
YOUR SAFETY
FOR THE REST
OF YOUR LIFE."

THE GOV'T
OFFERED HŌJI A
DEAL—HE'D BEEN
CLEVER ENOUGH TO
BUILD THIS HUGE
ORGANIZATION AND
EVEN PURCHASE A
BATTLESHIP WITHOUT
ANYONE KNOWING!

THE
GOVERNMENT'S
PRACTICAL.
THAT WAY.

THEY
COULDN'T
CARE LESS
FOR SHISHIO'S
"CODE."

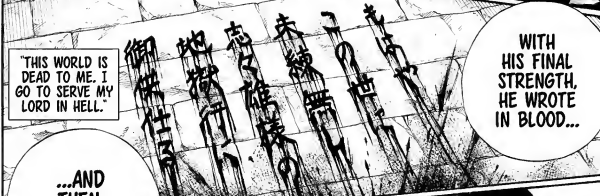
HE COULDN'T
DEFEND HIS
LORD.

HE WAS
THE CAPTIVE OF
A GOV'T SO WEAK
AND SHAMEFUL
THAT IT WOULD
TURN TO ITS
ENEMIES FOR
STRENGTH.

HŌJI
WAS IN
DESPAIR.



SO HE
TOOK OUT A
SMALL BLADE
HE'D HIDDEN AND
SLIT HIS OWN
THROAT.



"THIS WORLD IS
DEAD TO ME. I
GO TO SERVE MY
LORD IN HELL."

WITH
HIS FINAL
STRENGTH,
HE WROTE
IN BLOOD...

...AND
THEN,
HE WAS
GONE.





THE
WORLD'S
LIKE THAT,
KID.

YUMI
KNEW IT,
TOO.



THE ONE
WHO DIED
WITH
SHISHIO
MAKOTO...



WE
FOUGHT SO
HARD TO
WIN...

...BUT
WHAT
WERE WE
FIGHTING
FOR?!



THE MOST
FAMOUS
OIRAN* OF
THE NEW
YOSHIWARA
DISTRICT, SO
POPULAR
THAT EVEN
HIGH GOV'T
OFFICIALS
HAD A
HARD TIME
SEEING HER.

WE WENT
DRINKING
ONCE, AND
SHE TOLD
ME WHO
SHE WAS.

*IN THE LEGAL BROTHELS OF THE DAY KNOWN AS YŪKAKU, AN OIRAN HELD THE HIGHEST RANK.

I TOOK
PRIDE IN
BEING
OIRAN.

I'D CHOSEN
THAT LIFE, AND
I'D BECOME
THE BEST
IN IT.

THERE
WAS BILE
IN MY
HEART.

BUSINESS
WAS
GOOD...
BUT THE
WORLD
WASN'T.

...OF THE
MARIA LUZ...

UNTIL THE
INCIDENT...

THE
HECK?

MARIA
LUZ...!

THE SHIP'S NAME WAS MARIA LUZ.
THE NEW JAPANESE GOV'T WANTED
TO BE SEEN AS A CHAMPION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS, SO IT DEMANDED
THAT PERU RELEASE ITS WORKERS
FROM SERVITUDE.

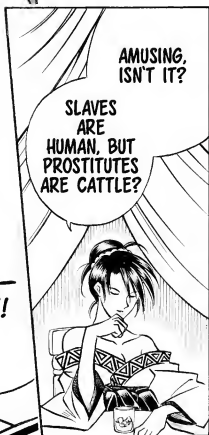
ONE DAY,
IN THE FIFTH
YEAR OF MEIJI,
A CHINESE WORKER
ESCAPED FROM A
PERUVIAN SHIP
DOCKED IN
YOKOHAMA.

PERU RETORTED THAT JAPAN KEPT WOMEN ENSLAVED
IN ITS BROTHELS. THE GOV'T AGREED TO SET THE
PROSTITUTES FREE...BUT BALKED AT COMPENSATING
THEM FOR THEIR STOLEN FREEDOM. "THEY HAVE
LOST THEIR FREEDOM AS HUMAN BEINGS," THE GOV'T
DECLARED, "AND SO ARE EQUIVALENT TO LIVESTOCK.
NO MONIES CAN BE PAID TO RELEASED CATTLE."



WE WHO
SUFFER SO
MUCH FOR
MEN'S
PLEASURE...

...ARE
WOMEN
NO LONGER—
BUT COWS!!



AMUSING,
ISN'T IT?

SLAVES
ARE
HUMAN, BUT
PROSTITUTES
ARE CATTLE?



YUMI WAS
HAPPY TO
HAVE MET
SHISHIO-
SAMA.

SO THAT'S
HOW THE
WORLD
WORKS,
BOY.

GLOB
GLOB



...GETS
HARDER
TO TELL
WHO'S
RIGHT.

IT
ONLY...



OH, HELL
NO!!

PSHT!



NOTHING
ELSE...

...WAS
CERTAIN.



THE TWO WHO GOT AWAY. THEY'RE STILL ON THE LOOSE.

OH YEAH. I ALMOST FORGOT.

I'M STARTING TO DEPRESS MYSELF. I THINK I'LL LEAVE NOW.

WOP



KNOWING 'HEAVEN'S SWORD' SOJIRŌ, HE PROBABLY NEVER WILL BE CAUGHT.

BILL, PLEASE?

HE'S PROBABLY AT SOME TEA SHOP RIGHT NOW, KICKING BACK.

I'M AFRAID I MUST BE GOING.

I DO
THINK I'D
LIKE TO
WANDER
ANOTHER TEN
YEARS OR
SO...

I'VE
YET TO
DECIDE.

OH,
THAT'S
NICE.



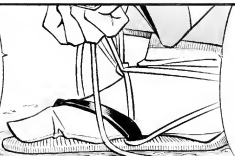
MM...
WHERE
SHOULD
I GO?



AN'
WHERE
WOULD
THAT
BE?



...TO ARRIVE
AT THEIR OWN,
INDIVIDUAL TRUTHS.
IT SHOULD TAKE
ME AT LEAST
THAT LONG.



TWO MEN WHO
ONCE WALKED
THE SAME PATH
TOOK THAT
MUCH TIME...



NORTH.

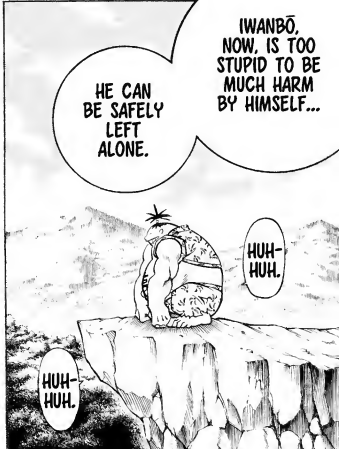
THE
WEATHER
IS GETTING
WARM HERE...
WHY NOT?

TRP

I DON'T
KNOW SO
WELL, BUT IT
DOES GO
NORTH.

WHERE DOES
THIS ROAD
LEAD, BY
THE WAY?





白京 鍋風

...MAY
NEVER BE
RECORDED IN
HISTORY, BUT
WILL NOT BE
FORGOTTEN BY
THIS ONE, NOT
EVER.

TELL THE
PATRIOTIC
SADOJIMA HŌJI
AT HIS GRAVE THAT
SHISHIO MAKOTO,
KOMAGATA YUMI,
AND THE REST
OF THE
JUPPONGATANA...

...BUT, SURE,
WHATEVER.



NOT SO SURE
HE'D BE HAPPY,
HAVING HIS ENEMY
SAY THAT...

IF YOU
THINK MIGHT
MAKES RIGHT,
YOU'RE
THINKING
LIKE SHISHIO.

I MEAN...
THAT MEANS
OUR WAY
IS RIGHT,
RIGHT?

HEY,
KENSHIN...

WE
DID WIN,
RIGHT?

WHAT'S
RIGHT WILL
BE RECORDED
IN HISTORY
AND PASSED
ALONG TO
FUTURE
GENERATIONS.

ALL
WE CAN
DO IS KEEP
FIGHTING
FOR WHAT
WE BELIEVE
IN.



WHICH IS
NOT TO
SAY THAT
A CODE IN
WHICH THE
WEAK...

...ARE THE
FOOD OF
THE
STRONG...

...CAN
EVER BE
RIGHT,
IN THIS
ONE'S
BELIEF.



...WHICH IS TO
SAY THAT, WITHIN
A FEW SCANT
YEARS, THE MEIJI
GOVERNMENT
ITSELF WOULD
ADOPT THAT SAME
"FUKOKU KYŌHEI"
PHILOSOPHY
OF "BUILDING THE
ARMY TO ENRICH
THE NATION"...

...LEADING
JAPAN FROM
ITS "AGE OF
CONFUSION"
TO TRIP,
HEADLONG,
INTO
PROGRESS.

...SOME
TRICK...

...OR
REALITY
?

IS THIS
A
DREAM?

SADOJIMA
HŌJI
AWAKES
TO FIND
HIMSELF...



I...
DIED...
DIDN'T
I...?
THEN...
THIS
MUST
BE?

...WHERE
...?

KASH



HELL,
OF
COURSE.



!

WSSH



SHISHIO-
SAMA!!

ENOUGH
WASTING
TIME!

WE
MUST
BE
GOING.

SEE?
JUST
AS I
SAID.

WAIT A
BIT, AND
HŌJI WAS
BOUND TO
TURN UP.



GOING?
WHERE?

WE'RE
OFF TO
CONQUER
OUR
ENVIRONMENT!

WHERE
ELSE?

I'LL
THINK
ABOUT
IT.

TK
TK

I KEEP
THINKING
WE'LL SEE
USUI, TOO...

THIS TIME,
LET'S TRULY
MAKE HIM ONE
OF US.

Y-YOU
DID!

DID I
NOT SAY YOU
WOULD FIRST
ENJOY THE
TASTE OF MY
VICTORY...?

WHY
DO YOU
HOLD
BACK?

I'M
COMING!!

HA!!

**HA, HA,
HA, HA, HA,
HA, HA!!**

THAT WORLD
COULD NOT
STOMACH MY
DEFEAT OF
BATTŌSAI.
BUT HERE...

NYAH,
HA,
HAH...

AH-
H-H,
HA,
HAH...

HA,
HA,
HAH...

...HERE,
THEY'RE
OUR KIND
OF PEOPLE.

To Be Continued in Volume 18:
Do You Still Bear the Scar?

The Secret Life of Characters (24)

AMENDMENT

—Shishio Makoto—

Now that the story's done, I'm thinking Shishio was my take on the appeal of evil.

Shishio will never compromise his beliefs, not even if it costs him his life. He cares not one bit for using others as a means to an end, and pursues his objective—absolute power—with ruthless abandon. Shishio is the perfect opposite to Kenshin, aside from that one key overlap in their approaches.

In his way, Shishio is his own kind of ideal. I think, somewhere in our hearts, we all have an admiration for the perfect anti-hero. I *did* enjoy drawing Shishio in his final battle against Kenshin—I must be honest. Though I regret that I'll never be able to get across Shishio's death-scene on the page the way I see it in my head, in that last scene, when he walks over that mountain of skeletons...that, I can say with some confidence, is about as good a dramatization of a villain in *Rurōken* that we're ever going to get. I doubt I'll ever write another character like this in all of the series, but in whatever next series I do after this, I'd like to try something similar.

...Oh, and while I'm thinking of it, there's something I'd like to apologize for. It's about Shishio's moves. His "Homura Dama" is one thing, but his "Guren Kaina" is pretty much a rip from "Shura" Kagetsu's "Daibaku-Satsu" in *TenSamu*. To those of you at SNK...

Please know that I am very sorry.

I'm disgusted with myself—all right?—and, worse, I can't promise I won't do it again. I am so-o-o in love with the *Samurai Spirits* series...I do think I'll be carrying it with me into the afterlife, along with NeoGeo CDZ and my Jim Lee 500-yen coin. Yes, I am indeed a Very Bad Man.



Rurouni Kenshin



GLOSSARY of the RESTORATION

*A brief guide to select Japanese terms used in **Rurouni Kenshin**. Note that, both here and within the story itself, all names are Japanese style—i.e., last or “family” name first, with personal or “given” name following. This is both because **Kenshin** is a “period” story, as well as to decrease confusion—if we were to take the example of **Kenshin**’s sakabatō and “reverse” the format of the historically established assassin-name “**Hitokiri Battōsai**,” for example, it would make little sense to then call him “**Battōsai Himura**.”*

Gatotsu

A seemingly simple *waza* or “move,” the **Gatotsu** of Saitō Hajime is, in actuality, devastatingly powerful, due both to its variety, and to its malleability. Should the first, seemingly simple thrust fail, for example, it easily can be modified to a sideways thrust without loss of tactical advantage. There are four different “types” of **Gatotsu**: *Isshiki*, *Nishiki*, and *Sanshiki* (Variants One, Two, and Three), as well as **Gatotsu Zeroshiki**—the final or “succession” technique which doubles or even triples the power of the original thrust.

Guren Kaina

Second of the madman Shishio Makoto’s “secret moves” to be revealed in this volume, the **Guren Kaina** (lit., “arm of crimson-flame”) ignites gunpowder stored in Shishio’s gauntlet to create a powerful (and unexpected!) explosion

Himura Kenshin

Kenshin’s “real” name, revealed to Kaoru only at her urging

Hiten Mitsurugi-ryū

Kenshin’s sword technique, used more for defense than offense. An “ancient style that pits one against many,” it requires exceptional speed and agility to master.

hitokiri

An assassin. Famous swordsmen of the period were sometimes thus known to adopt “professional” names—**Kawakami Gensai**, for example, was also known as “**Hitokiri Gensai**.”

Amakakeru Ryū no Hirameki

Lit., “Heavens-Bridging Dragon Spark” (as in spark of “inspiration,” not “fire” or “flame”). Final or “succession” move of **Hiten Mitsurugi-ryū**, it incorporates everything Kenshin has been taught so far—including the overriding will to *live*. Also known as “Dragon Flight of Heaven.”

Bakumatsu

Final, chaotic days of the Tokugawa regime

-chan

Honorific. Can be used either as a diminutive (e.g., with a small child—“Little Hanako or Kentarō”), or with those who are grown, to indicate affection (“My dear...”).

-dono

Honorific. Even more respectful than **-san**; the effect in modern-day Japanese conversation would be along the lines of “Milord So-and-So.” As used by Kenshin, it indicates both respect and humility.

Edo

Capital city of the **Tokugawa Bakufu**; renamed **Tokyo** (“Eastern Capital”) after the Meiji Restoration

Futae no Kiwami

Technique taught to Sano by Anji of the **Juppongatana**, in which the first punch breaks down resistance, and then the second—delivered within an instant of the first—obliterates the target, whatever it may be (thus its translation, “Mastery of Two Layers”). In the **Sanjū no Kiwami** or “Mastery of Three Layers,” Sano snaps out all five fingers to increase the power of the attack yet again.

Kyoto

Home of the Emperor and imperial court from A.D. 794 until shortly after the *Meiji Restoration* in 1868

loyalists

Those who supported the return of the Emperor to power; *Ishin Shishi*

Meiji Restoration

1853-1868; culminated in the collapse of the *Tokugawa Bakufu* and the restoration of imperial rule. So called after Emperor Meiji, whose chosen name was written with the characters for "culture and enlightenment."

Oniwabanshū

Elite group of *onmitsu* or "spies" of the *Edo* period, also known as *ninja* or *shi-nobi*

patriots

Another term for *Ishin Shishi*...and, when used by Sano, not a flattering one

rurouni

Wanderer, vagabond

sakabatō

Reversed-edge sword (the dull edge on the side the sharp should be, and vice versa); carried by *Kenshin* as a symbol of his resolution never to kill again

-sama

Honorific. The respectful equivalent of *-san*, *-sama* is used primarily in addressing persons of much higher rank than one's self...or, in a romantic sense, in addressing those upon whom one is crushing, wicked hard.

-san

Honorific. Carries the meaning of "Mr.," "Ms.," "Miss," etc., but used more extensively in Japanese than its English equivalent (note that even an enemy may be addressed as *"-san"*).

Tokugawa Bakufu

Military feudal government which dominated Japan from 1603 to 1867

Tokyo

The renaming of *"Edo"* to *"Tokyo"* is a marker of the start of the *Meiji Restoration*

Homura Dama

By purposefully chipping the edge of the heirloom "Mugenjin," forged by master swordsmith Arai Shakkū, the madman Shishio Makoto can ensure that his blade never loses its edge—an edge fueled into slashing and burning flame by the flesh of the many men which it has slain over the course of Shishio's wicked life. First of Shishio's "secret moves" to be revealed, also known as "Burning Soul."

Ishin Shishi

Loyalist or pro-Imperialist *patriots* who fought to restore the Emperor to his ancient seat of power

Juppongatana

Written with the characters for "ten" and "swords," Shishio's *Juppongatana* are literally that—the ten generals or "swords" he plans to use in his overthrow of Japan

Kaguzuchi

Third and last of Shishio Makoto's "secret swords" to be revealed, the tornado-like *Kaguzuchi* is initiated by the scrape of the sword tip upon scabbard, thus igniting a whirlwind storm of flame

Kaiten-Kenbu Rokuren

Ultimate technique of Shinomori Aoshi in which two *kodachi* held in reverse-grip are employed to deliver six rapid strikes. Lit., "successive six-strike wheeling-sword dance."

kodachi

Medium-length sword, shorter than the *katana* but longer than the *wakizashi*. Its easy maneuverability also makes for higher defensive capability.

-kun

Honorific. Used in the modern day among male students, or those who grew up together, but another usage—the one you're more likely to find in *Rurouni Kenshin*—is the "superior-to-inferior" form, intended as a way to emphasize a difference in status or rank, as well as to indicate familiarity or affection.

Kuzu-Ryūsen

Hiten Mitsurugi technique used by *Kenshin* in which nine vital spots are hit in quick succession